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A REGAL HOME FOR PRINCELY BOOKS

The library which stands senior to all other American book collections, owned by the oldest of the country's universities, has at last the outward and visible housing adequate to the value long placed upon it by all with expert knowledge of books and their uses. Harvard's possessions of lettered sort, ranging up the scale from present-day pamphlets to the rarest of yesterday's volumes rarely bound, are exceeded in point of numbers by the Congressional Library at Washington, the magnificent Astor-Tilden-Lenox collection in the heart of busy New York, and the Boston Public Library; but as a storehouse of materials for the scholar and special student the Cambridge institution yields place to not one of even such a trio. For the best of a generation these riches have, indeed, been crowded into little room, practically stored away in the inadequate chambers and corridors and even cellars of old Gore Hall, and while everyone in touch with the situation recognized the imperative need for ampler and more modern accommodations, no one came forward with the wherewithal to provide them. But at last Gore Hall is no more; a building has been completed fit in every way to hold and display the ancient seat of learning's volumes and manuscripts, and this splendid edifice, which ranks architecturally with the best of American collegiate structures, stands as the memorial to one of the "Titanic" victims, one of the university's younger sons but one of the world's true bibliophiles, who bequeathed to his Alma Mater many times over the most valuable collection of books she has ever received — in intrinsic worth far surpassing that first gift of all received when John Harvard's self started her library with his modest benefaction of less than four hundred little volumes.

The far-flung world of book-lovers, which knows no "border nor breed nor birth," is aware that this munificent gift of Mrs. George D. Widener, of Philadelphia, was prompted by a desire to furnish proper home for the literary gatherings of her son, Harry Elkins Widener, who, though his name was added to Harvard's graduate roster only seven years ago, is none the less an out-

standing figure in the history of American book collecting. Even before graduation had called him from daily association with that "Yard" where lovers of books and makers of books for generations have been accustomed to come and go, he had begun to get together what was to prove one of the most valuable collections of rare volumes in the New World, and he had pursued his hobby with a passion as persistent as it was intelligent until the black April of 1912 swept him down in the swirling waters of the North Atlantic. Young Mr. Widener (he was but twenty-seven) had brought together first editions of Shakespeare, Milton and Spenser, Johnson, Goldsmith and Gray, Keats and Shelley, Dickens and Thackeray, Meredith and "R. L. S.," till his library boasted an assembly probably unique of its sort. Many of his findings were copies personally associated with their authors; perhaps inscribed for presentation to someone scarcely less famous than the writer, or annotated with author's corrections to be made in later edition.

He who had searched out these volumes was of course innately possessed of a deep love for books, but it was also noteworthy that his knowledge of them, a knowledge intimate and technical, was exceptionally accurate and extensive. Few were better judges of such than the late Bernard Quaritch, and he had voiced unqualified praise of this youthful bibliophile's unusual qualifications to stand with the foremost collectors of modern days.

Knowing that it was for him that Dr. Rosenbach, of Philadelphia, bought in the Van Antwerp folio Shakespeare of 1623 for eighteen thousand dollars, and that, at the sale of the first part of the Hoe library, he was the underbidder, at nineteen thousand dollars, for the Gutenberg Bible on vellum (which went out to the shelves of Mr. Huntington of Los Angeles), it is easy enough to say: "Of course; anyone with so long a purse can gather fine books." Nothing could be wider of the truth. Mere money will purchase miles of handsome bindings and yet never enable one not endowed with the litterateur's heart and mind to fill high cases with such unique jewels of letters as were those of Mr. Widener's. If ample means be a *sine qua non* for such collecting, so, too, and not one whit less, are entire enthusiasm, immensely detailed knowledge, and the nicest discrimination,

and these are not the findings of the open market-place. It is to be recorded, too, that his was the exceptionally fortunate opportunity of sitting at the feet of Beverly Chew, who, since Robert Hoe is no longer here, must be accounted the dean of American book-lovers, at once in wide learning and in that single-eyed desire which, after all, has the most to do with making the veritable collector.

When the will of the young enthusiast disclosed that his really princely library was to go to Harvard, the university was confronted with the humiliating fact that it had no suitable place for the deposit of such a collection; antique Gore had become so crammed with books that mere navigation among the stacks had become difficult. Then came forward the widowed mother of the donor, with an offer now given shapely form in stone and mortar. Her two-million dollar gift, be it added, offers large interest to book-lovers and library users quite apart from her son's collection which is to be its hub and centre. For in this building will be applied the "laboratory principle." Harvard intends to do what Oxford's Bodleian has been doing for centuries, and do it better. An accredited visitor from any country on the globe will find himself as much at home in one of the private rooms of the Widener Memorial as in his own library, and just outside the door he will have immediate access to all the treasures that the Harvard collections contain. In similar fashion the undergraduates are to be provided with such facilities for work among the shelves as have been quite impossible in outgrown, inadequate Gore. If the visiting scholars and the Harvard professors are to have eighty private studies scattered about the building, the students are to have no fewer than 350 little separate "cubicles," each furnished with desk and chair, where they may read in seclusion, with needed volumes on their tables and any other book required close at hand in the stacks.

On the main floor, reached by the steps from the Yard, the memorial feature has its most imposing illustration. The visitor passes through the doors into a vestibule, which opens into a great entrance-hall, this in turn leading to the Widener Memorial Hall. This is an apartment measuring 40 by 32 feet,

lighted on each side by a court. Beyond is the room for the installation of the Widener collection, a chamber 38 by 60 feet. Here will be placed and exhibited the items which make up a library so striking that none doubts but that it would have come, with only a grant of those years snatched from the man in so horrible a fashion, to be possibly the premier private book collection in the world. Mr. Widener's ambition, voiced with a characteristic modesty, would without a doubt have fully come to pass: "I should like, some day, to own a library of a sort to distinguish me in all the world of books."

He had set himself to the achievement of his self-appointed task with a singleness of purpose that was itself large assurance of ultimate success. Five brief years had accomplished much, for while other American collectors excelled him in the range of their acquisitions, not one, with the single exception of Mr. Huntington, had to show volumes of such surpassing quality, such absolute immaculate copies of the great rarities of two hemispheres.

In the eyes of their fortunate possessor, the favorite single tome of all these was, perhaps, the Countess of Pembroke's own copy of that famed *Arcadia*, which her immortal brother Sir Philip Sidney had dedicated to her "kindly eyes," in 1580. Turning reverently back the old binding of Elizabethan red morocco, its sides curiously ornamented with hearts and flames of tarnished gold, with its intertwined initials of the house of Sidney and Montgomery in the midst, one finds on the title page the signature of the Earl of Ancram (himself a poet) and his record of the presentation of the book to him by the Countess of Montgomery, who had received it directly from her mother, "Pembroke's lady." It was later owned by Richard Heber, then by Sir Henry Hope, and so came down to its present stand through the libraries of Clarence Bement and George C. Thomas.

Scarcely less valuable than this is the actual *Eikon Basilike*, allegedly from the august pen of the first Charles Stuart, and certainly cherished, read and reread, by the son, second of the name. The authorship question need not be entered upon; the ownership is beyond dispute, bearing the royal arms upon a

binding of Mearne's own laying; and Mearne, it will be remembered, was the king of English binders, in those far-gone days, as well as the English king's binder. Close by this rest a first edition of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays, a fine folio of 1647, once the property of the second Earl of Bridgewater, "the Elder Brother" of Milton's *Comus*, and a *Life of Johnson*, which the garrulous Boswell's self once sent to the artist friend of "the great leviathan of learning," Sir Joshua Reynolds, to whom this foremost of biographies had been dedicated.

Yet another all but priceless quartet are these: sturdy Sam Butler's personal copy of his *Hudibras* (1663), a "first," of course; a particularly tall, clean issue of Walpole's *Noble Authors*, formerly on the shelves of the poet-painter Blake, and annotated by him; Coleridge's *Lay Sermons* of 1817, later endorsed by "S. T. C.," and, a humorously unique *Ingoldsby Legends*. By this is meant not merely that the three amusing volumes appear in their several first issues, but that on the blank page which, by some freak, appeared in the earliest of the trio, Barham had written (to his publisher and printer)—

By a blunder for which I have only to thank
Myself, here's a page has been somehow left blank.
Aha! my friend Moxon, I have you!—you'll look
In vain for a fault in one page of my book.

THOS. INGOLDSBY.

While Mr. Widener had many fine Byrons, one item well out of the ordinary is found in a copy of Tom Moore's *Lalla Rookh*, formerly owned by the Noble Lord, who, on the fly-leaf had penned a quatrain. After careful research, the late owner had decided the lines were unpublished, and surely they are characteristic of the disillusioned poet:—

The keenest pangs the wretched find
Are rapture to the dreary void,
That leafless desert of the mind,
That waste of feelings unemploy'd.

The Browning items are notable. Here is the *Marathon: An Epic*, set to paper by Elizabeth Barrett when a girl yet in her teens, and a personal copy of those *Sonnets from the*

Portuguese (1850) which enshrine a romance as beautifully as that romance was beautiful. Here are the *Bells and Pomegranates* and *Balaustion's Adventure*, given by Robert Browning to his wife, and the *Prometheus Bound*, which went to Mary Robinson "From her affectionate Ba." Another presentation volume of equal interest is not far off: the *Vanity Fair* which "William Makepeace Goliath, white waistcoat and all," sent to his friend Macready, the actor. Swinburne's *Rosemund* is the one he sent, autographed, to Rossetti; while from the library of Ruskin has come a copy of Wilde's *Happy Princess*, "with the regard and admiration of the author."

In his Dickensiana Mr. Widener has been fortunate enough to embrace a number of items, each properly held as *sui generis*. There is, for instance, the petty cash-book that the future historian of Carton and Chuzzlewit kept as a lad of sixteen in the law office of Edward Blackmore, in Gray's Inn. Some two dozen of the pages are in his own immature hand, each week bringing the entry: "C. Dickens, salary; 13 shillings, 6 pence." Here is certainly the oldest known autograph of Dickens. The agreements between Macrone, the original publisher of the *Sketches by Boz*, and the author, illustrate the meteoric rise of that prodigiously talented young man. On January 5th, 1836, he parted with the copyright for a hundred pounds, while six months later almost to a day we find him giving Macrone twenty times as much for a complete release from the earlier obligation. *Pickwick* had come to the world, meanwhile, and those *Posthumous Papers* had spelt immense popularity, so, to forestall a reissue of the *Sketches* with no profit to himself, he bought back all rights. In this same collection, with its intimate memories of "The Shakespeare of the Common People," are the sheets of the parody upon Gray's *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* in Dickens holograph; thirty pages of corrected proof for the original issue of *David Copperfield*; and a presentation copy of the rare *Village Coquettes*, that ill-fated comic opera which was dedicated to J. P. Harley in the famous "Pickwick" year.

When one comes to the first editions such a wealth of

material offers itself to the chronicling that it is difficult to know where to begin or close. The four tall Shakespeare folios are, of course, the most valuable; magnificently perfect copies all. There are, too, "firsts" of the Shakespeare *Sonnets* (1609), the *Faerie Queene* (1590-'06) and *Colin Clout's Come Home Again* of "fire-winged Spenser," Raphael Holinshed's curious *Chronicles* (1577), Ben Jonson's dramas, Burton's quaintly learned *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), the splendid Hope-Edwards copy; Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* (1667 and 1671), the former the first issue of the first title-page of the first edition; Herrick's charming *Hesperides* (1646), Swift's *Gulliver* (1726-27), and *Tale of a Tub* (1704), Defoe's *Crusoe* (1719), Gray's *Elegy* and the *Odes*, as well as the beautiful Strawberry Hill issue of the last named; the pleasant *Fables* of John Gay (1727) and the *Vicar of Wakefield* of "Pretty Poll" Goldsmith (1766), Shelley's *Address to the Irish People*, and *Alastor* (1816), and that paper-covered *Omar Khayyam* (1858) which by happy chance brought undying fame to Edward Fitzgerald and a masterpiece of translation to a grateful world.

Mr. Widener's collection of Stevenson books and manuscripts was by far the most complete ever brought together. It included all the extremely rare pamphlets as well as all the "Private Issues," *The Master of Ballantrae* and *Kidnapped*, for instance, but more than any of these, more, indeed, than all combined, was its manuscript beginning of the autobiography. Report had it for a time that this was on the person of the owner when he sailed on the "Titantic," but rumor was wrong. The manuscript here referred to is entitled *Memoirs of Himself, by Robert Louis Stevenson. Book I: Childhood*. Written in San Francisco, in the January of 1880, it is included in a quarto blank-book and covers twenty-two pages, on one side only. On the cover beneath the title is inscribed: "Given to Isabel Stewart Strong, the amanuensis, for future use when the underwriter is dead. With love, R. L. S." Here in his own inimitable manner, he starts to lay bare many intimate details of his early years. It may be not inapt to quote, in closing, the paragraphs which compose page one:—

"I have the more interest in beginning these memoirs where and how I do, because I am living absolutely alone in San Francisco, and because from two years of anxiety and, according to the doctors, a touch of malaria, I may say I am altogether changed into another character. After weeks in this city, I know only a few neighboring streets; I seem to be cured of all my adventurous whims and even of curiosity; and am content to sit here by the fire and await the course of fortune. Indeed, I know myself no longer; and as I am changed in heart, I hope I have the same choice to look back impartially on all that has come and gone heretofore.

"There is, after all, no truer sort of writing than what is to be found in autobiographies, and certainly none more entertaining. As if any, it is fiction of the higher class which is the quintessence and last word both of veracity and entertainment. A man is perhaps not very sure of his taste in matters that concern him so nearly as the facts of his own career; he is not perhaps in a position to expand or brooder: but where can he have so fine an opportunity of condensation? I shall try here to be very dense and only to touch on what concerned me very deeply; for, as I am after all a man, that must be to some degree the concern of mankind."

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